Tender is the Flesh

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Tender is the Flesh

by DerryDeer

Summary

Will didn’t know how long the doctor had been keeping him locked away. All he knew was that nobody would be looking for him.
Hannibal had made sure of it.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Snow crunched under the man's feet as he walked towards the shivering form of Will. It was loud, and his boots made the sound echo, like the snap of brittle bones. Will averted his eyes, shivering more from his anxiety than the cold.
The man was big, intimidating with both his stature and how pristine he kept his image. Not a hair was out of place, despite the freezing wind that left everyone else frostbitten and disheveled. This man seemed invincible to the weather. He placed a firm hand on Will's face and brought his head up to face him, staring into Will's soul. His cheeks hurt with the strength of the man's grip. He grunted his satisfaction and stepped away.
Will Graham was fragile. He knew this, had always been painfully aware of it. Everyone around him knew it.
Everyone, especially this strange man standing before him.
He had introduced himself as Doctor Hannibal Lecter, Will's court-appointed psychiatrist. They said he'd traveled all the way from Italy to consult on the curious young man and, hopefully, place a diagnosis around his neck.
Doctor Lecter was meant to collar him.
"Where have your thoughts wandered to, William?" He spoke with a thick accent, "Which room of your mind palace calls to you?"
Will looked around. He didn't remember inviting the doctor into his home. He didn't remember lighting the warm, crackling fire in the corner of the room.
"Um," Will tapped his tongue on the roof of his mouth, swallowed. His mouth was so dry.
"You struggle to articulate your thoughts and feelings," Dr. Lecter wrote a few notes, "do you fear me?"
Will shook his head.
"What concerns you, William?"
He didn't speak. The doctor pried further, filling the room with his luxurious and velvety words. He soothed Will.
"I didn't do it," he spoke quietly, barely above a whisper. "I didn't kill him."
A minuscule smirk made its way onto his lips, just a quirk in his lips, and smoothed before the skittish boy could take notice.
"I didn't kill him, I just found him," he justified, trying to plead his case like he was in court once again.
"You had the knife in your hands, William," the doctor began to smile again, looking to his notes to hide it, how his interest was far beyond professional curiosity. "Your fingerprints were all over the scene, your own blood intertwined with his. The evidence was far from circumstantial."
"I didn't kill him!" Will launched from his seat. "I don't know-- I don't know why my blood was there, but I didn't do it!"
Will was furious, hands balled up by his sides.
This was exactly what Dr. Lecter wanted, Will assumed. Why else would he be smiling like this? What could explain the gleam in his eyes, if not pride?
"You must calm yourself," he spoke like a snake, walking towards Will, invading his space.
A quick prick in his neck and Will became drowsy, unable to keep his head up as he slumped into the doctor's waiting arms. Hannibal's mask was finally able to slip and he smiled, pressing his nose to Will's hair, consuming him while he ascended the stairs.
The world went black and cool as Will fell into sedation.
When Will awoke, he was no longer in his home. No longer was there a loud fire or an old,

scratchy chair. It took a few seconds for the cool silk bedcovers to register on his nerves, but he didn't mind much, still swimming in the pools of his sleep. Will's head was swimming far too much for him to question where these sheets came from, or why he could feel them in places he was sure were covered by his clothing.
The horrifying realization came moments later. Why was he in bed?
Why could he feel the fabric in his most private areas?
With shaking hands, Will lifted the sheets, face paling when he saw himself, freshly shaven and naked as a baby. Powdered.
The shock swallowed every nerve in his body, keeping his mind bound and his eyes fixed on his body. A scream clawed at his throat and he shook with the force of keeping it in, his mind's voice telling him that screaming would lead to something worse than a silk bed.
He hadn't noticed Dr. Lecter entering the room.
The hand on his shoulder made him startle, breaking out in goosebumps as he was pushed back into the pillows. He stared at the doctor like a deer caught in the headlights.
"Really, William, I had hoped you'd be more receptive to my help," he sighed, feigning exhaustion, "I suppose we will have to start from square one all over again."
Starting again? What was he talking about? Will felt cold, fearful of the time he'd supposedly lost. The doctor stepped away for a moment, coming back with his hand held behind his back. Will scurried away as he stepped closer, stopped by the hard headboard. Hannibal grasped his chin with a deceptively gentle touch, the pressure from his thumb reminded Will of the true power that he held. The mirth in his deep eyes whispered his deeper motivations.
Will didn't know how long the doctor had been keeping him locked away. All he knew was that nobody would be looking for him.
Hannibal had made sure of it, told him how he'd managed to come up with a convincing enough story one night while Will was sobbing and heaving, trying to purge the likely drugged dinner he had been served. No, force-fed, his mouth held open with finders pinching the joints in his jaw, pushing the food in after Will's refusal.
"This is for your well-being, William. It is a vital part of your treatment," the doctor crooned as one freezing hand slid to his neck, rubbing to soothe the food down Will's sore throat.
"They know it is. I know this is what you need. All you need to do is open your mind to me and accept your therapy."
Exhaustion took Will's limbs, he was too tired to fight the doctor anymore. He tried to keep his glare, but ultimately lost his battle with the rocking waters of unconsciousness.
"We shall begin in the morning." The doctor smiled as he brushed his fingers over Will's eyes, holding his prey close as he ascended the stairs, this time cuffing Will to his designated bed. There would be no getting hurt for this boy.
The sleep was dreamless and still, but warm, bundled in possibly too many blankets, but warmth was far better than chill. There would be no freezing for this prized boy, Hannibal decided. Will would be pampered like any pet should be, and his calm state would leave his mind open to the doctor's touch. And, one day, Will would be ready to see him as he should. Will would come to not only accept, but appreciate his therapy and the true self of the man who so graciously offered it to him. Will would love him yet.
Will would be grateful for Hannibal's aid. Will wouldn't know how to go on without him, would simply need to stay right where he was where his doctor could hold him, help him, and love him.
One day Hannibal would be able to tell this specimen who he really was and just how they came to know each other. What a lovely day that would be, he thought
Hannibal began preparing Will's dinner, a simple soup of broth and greens. His boy would

surely be nauseous from sedation.
He frowned as he seared the cabbage, deciding to try a different method for the foreseeable future. Something more palatable for the both of them.
A groan stopped Hannibal's thoughts, setting the pots to a light simmer so he could rush to aid his poor, confused Will.

Will stared blankly at the painted ceiling from his restraints, unable to turn his head or lift his hands to scratch at his itching neck. He knew he'd been strapped from head to ankles, but he couldn't remember why, or by whom. He let a loud groan escape his parched throat, crackling and creaking like the floorboards of an old boat. He needed to be sure that whoever bound him here hadn't forgotten about him. Will had to be certain that he wouldn't be left to starve in some deranged experiment.
He let out a breath of relief as he heard footsteps ascending stairs, unsure why his adrenaline spiked as the door opened.
"William," Hannibal smiled at him, hair in front of his glasses like he'd been disturbed in his study, "good to see you awake again. I was beginning to worry about you."
"Let me up," he struggled to look to his doctor. "I need to piss, let me up. I'm uncomfortable. Why--"
Dr. Lecter held up a hand. "You had a violent outburst last night, William. This is as much for your safety as it is mine. If you require the restroom, I can accompany you after supper." Will looked confused after the word.
Hadn't he only just slept through the night? There was no sun to be seen behind the thick curtains in this room, but Will was sure it was morning.
Nevertheless, WIll's attentive psychiatrist left him and returned with a bowl of black and green soup. It smelled almost as rancid as it looked.
"You must finish it so your mind has the nutrition it requires to resume our therapy. You are quite malnourished," the doctor explained, "I've tailored a meal plan that will give you the strength that you need." He smiled again as he set the soup down, adjusting Will to sit up in his bed, Still restrained from his waist down.
Will ate reluctantly, staring at the doctor who stared at him.
The soup was delicious, smooth, and fragrant. The herbs and broth soothed his torn throat and made Will warm where it settled in his stomach. Morsels of beef that strung apart easily and potatoes and carrots that tasted like childhood urged him to eat more.
Hannibal smiled at his boy, a ravenous wolf. He hadn't thought Will would be so starved and kicked himself for not considering this.
Next time Will needed to be sedated for an extended period, Hannibal would tube feed him. This couldn't happen again.
He gently lifted the spoon from Will's grasp and took the bowl, setting it aside on the nightstand.
Will glared at him, a furrow between his brows and soup still dripping from his lips to his chin. Hannibal desperately wanted to lick it up, push it back into WIll's mouth with his smooth tongue. To taste his cooking in Will's mouth, to suck the meat from between his teeth and eat himself.
"I should hope that your full stomach will lend to a more productive day for our efforts," he smiled. Will thought he looked like a cat about to catch its dinner. "Perhaps we'll be able to share a proper meal tonight."
The insinuation of being let out of the restraints made Will perk, sitting up and nodding.
"I'd like that," he hated how true the statement felt. "I want to… to get better." A question

mark belonged there, he thought. Will didn't know what he needed to recover from.
"Wonderful," Dr. Lecter grinned and stood. He dimmed the lights and lit a candlestick, holding it in front of his face. His features distorted as the candle flickered and he spoke, becoming a being of only a nose and eyes.
"Who do you see?" He asked lightly, eyes creasing with a smile. Dr. Lecter gave Will a few moments to think, staring back at him through the blackness of the room.
"A monster," Will muttered. "The kind you imagine living in the woods behind your house. The kind that kidnaps you when you're home alone."
How clever he was.
"What does this monster do once he has you? When you're alone, when you're isolated from those who protect you?"
"He gets rid of them so he can take me. He doesn't want to kill me, he wants to have me. Wants me to be his, wholly his. He does anything he has to."
Oh, so clever. Hannibal was lucky he'd chosen such an observant subject. With each conversation they had, the doctor was more and more impressed by William's descriptions and clear view of the world; with no emotions to cloud his opinions.
Hannibal guessed they were safely locked away in the basement of his memories, simply begging for someone to rip up the floorboards and expose Will's truest feelings, his deepest secrets, and darkest desires.
He could practically hear Will's hidden self screaming for Hannibal to expose him, accept him. Envelop him, body and soul.
Will was still speaking, brilliant blue eyes sporting a thin gloss as he spoke, unblinking.
"And when you are finally his, William? What happens then to you and this monster?"
"He consumes me entirely."
"Though he doesn't want to end your life," Hannibal nodded. What a clever boy, indeed.
"No," Will shook his head, hanging low and staring at his hands, dry and cracking from the cool winter air that crept through the old house. Hannibal would need to do something about that.
"No, when he consumes me, I become a part of him. I cease to exist as myself and am just an extension of his self after that. The monster is the man, and I am the Id."
"You fear that you will one day become a monster yourself. Tell me, do you fear your father's murder? Do you fear that your admittance will create what you fear most, so you choose to deny your actions? You turn that part of yourself, the self that is capable of murdering your own father, your only caregiver, into a monster so that you do not have to face the fact that the monster is who you truly are."
Will just sat in silence, allowing the musty air to suffocate him as his psychiatrist's words sunk into his skin.
No denial, no admittance. No begging or bartering. He posed no threat, no sign of fight left in his body.
Hannibal hummed and blew his candle out, the smoke tunneling through his nostrils and masking the scent of Will's sweat.
The light flicked on and Will flinched, squeezing his eyes shut for a few moments before looking up to face his doctor. Hannibal smiled and tilted his head slightly.
Will thought his metaphor of a cat was becoming increasingly accurate.
"I will let you rest with our conversation while I prepare our meal. I still have some of the cow you enjoyed in your soup in the freezer. Perhaps we'll share a nice cottage pie."
With that, he exited and left Will in the room that screamed with silence.
He didn't know how much time passed with him trapped on the plush bed, the room devoid

of natural light. Will still sweated as though the sun were beating down on him, baking him alive under the quilted sheets and the heated walls.
It could've been hours. Could've been days before Hannibal rapped gently on the door, peeping his head in with a light smile and a smooth "dinner is ready."
The "if you'll behave" went unspoken, but the threat hung heavy in the air. Will cooperated as he was untied and hated himself for moaning at the massage on his wrists. His doctor smiled before letting up, untying Will's ankles and gentling him back onto the bed when he shot up.
"You shouldn't strain yourself by moving, William. I'll help you. We couldn't do with you falling down the stairs," he smiled again. Will thought the doctor wouldn't mind cleaning his blood off the floor, peering into his mind as he sutured his skull and assessed him for a concussion.
Maybe being concussed would make this situation better. Maybe head trauma was just what Will needed to wake up from this fucked up dream.
Will allowed himself to be carried down the stairs, arms around his chest and knees holding tight like they knew what he was thinking.
He ate with the doctor, staring at him as the man minded his own, chewing thoughtfully and sipping on his wine. Will glared at the glass as it touched Dr. Lecter's lips. Hannibal quirked his brow at Will.
"You've yet to touch your milk," he hummed. "You need to regain your strength."
"I'd rather what you're having," Will spat.
Hannibal chuckled, and Will smiled for the first time in the time he was captive and awake. The first genuine smile he'd had in years.
"Perhaps next time. I'm not one to encourage underage drinking, but I suppose if you're making progress, maybe I should be keen to reward you."
Will kept his small smile and continued eating, Dr. Lecter staring this time.
"Drink your milk," he reminded. Then, after a beat of silence, "Or I'll have to let the pie I've made go to waste."
Will chewed and swallowed, taking another bite as he thought. "Pie?" He spoke around minds of mashed potatoes and bits of meat.
Hannibal waited for the boy to swallow before nodding. "I've prepared a blackberry pie. I was told it was your favorite," he smiled. "I hope a taste of home would aid in your therapy."
Will's stomach flipped around his dinner. He hadn't had any kind of desert in years. He stared at his doctor, who simply nodded to the chilled glass of milk, sweating and waiting for Will to take a sip.
Will drank. One sip turned into two, then three, until suddenly, his glass was empty and the boy was gasping for air, a dribble of the milk crawling out of the corner of his mouth and rolling down his chin.
Hannibal's smile widened, his eyes creasing at the corners.
"Was it good?"
"Delicious."
"Would you like another glass?"
Will simply nodded, embarrassed for his enjoyment of the beverage and his refusal to touch it before.
Dr. Lecter chuckled to himself as he stood, dabbing his mouth with a napkin before replenishing Will's glass from a jug in the kitchen.
"You tend to become childish when faced with a less than favorable choice. You respond well to bribery, and, dare I say," he smiled and met WIll's eyes as he replaced his glass, "praise."

Will sighed and picked up his glass, taking a long sip and keeping the doctor's stare.
"I just like pie. And I'm hungry," he shook his head and moved to stand, finding his legs felt like cement. "I don't feel very well. I think I want to go to bed."
"Without your pie?" Hannibal smiled that slick cat smile of his. Will found that it now made him feel sticky and slimy on his insides. Like that smile and those eyes made their way into his body and began ripping him apart. Knowing and exposing all.
Will stared at Hannibal, attempting to glare but his face now felt like putty. Paralyzed and lax. "I just want to go to bed now, can I go?"
Dr. Lecter hummed, watching his subject struggle to move.
"Soon, my Will. Soon, but not yet."
The blood drained from Will's face as he stared at his doctor. "What did you do to me?" He was so dizzy. When did he get dizzy, or was he always this way? It was so hard to keep his head up.
Will's neck gave in and his chin touched his chest. Gravity felt so heavy now.
"You won't go unconscious," the doctor assured. "You won't be able to move, but you will feel. I'll try to be gentle when moving you."
All will could do was breathe, his heart hammering away in his chest and slowing. His body was no longer his to control.
Hannibal pulled Will's chair away from the table and laid him on the ground, stroked his shoulders, hands, forehead. Everywhere, anywhere.
Will watched him, helpless as his mouth was pulled open. He tasted his doctor's dry thumb on his tongue as his throat was admired. Appraised like a painting at auction.
He watched in horror when Dr. Lecter presented a short, thin, and blue-tinted tube. Will's eyes welled up in horror as the package was ripped open, the sound of plastic tearing away from paper echoed in his mind.
When did Dr. Lecter get these supplies? Why hadn't will noticed them before?
"Traditionally," he began as he applied a lubricant to the tube, "a patient would be asleep for this procedure." Hannibal gave him a light smile when he met his eyes. "But I'd prefer talking you through it, to ensure your understanding."
Will stared in horror as the tube was fed down his throat, squeezing into his esophagus. He needed to gag. His body wouldn't let him. It hurt, felt like his throat was burning all the way to the basement, still staring at his doctor as he was laid on a cool metal table.
It was clinical, the basement. White and grey walls, the scent of chemicals and Chlorox bleach staining the air. He flinched as his tube was connected to a ventilator and his lungs filled with air. He hadn't even realized he wasn't breathing.
"Will, are you listening?" Dr. Lecter's voice broke through the panicked fog in his brain.
"I'm going to open you up now, do you understand? I'll be taking a part of your liver."
His frozen eyes filled with terror. His doctor tutted at him like it was as simple as a child getting a scraped knee. Like the fact that Will was going to get fucking cut open was no big deal at all.
It started as a pressure on his stomach, his doctor's gaze transfixed by the beads of blood coming through Will's skin. Then it burned, the cut becoming longer and wider. Then, Will couldn't feel anything, his body frozen by the paralytics and his mind by fear. He wanted to scream and thrash, to fight as the man's gloved fingers disappeared into Will's severed skin and fished around like he was trying to find something. He was, Will thought bitterly.
Doctor Hannibal Lecter was looking for Will's liver. But not only that, he was looking for his will to live. Looking for the deepest and most whole part of Will that he could take for his own, that he could study and cherish. He wanted a part of Will for himself, but he also

wanted Will as a person. Hannibal knew that this was going to be Will's becoming.
The burning pain continued, the tugging and ripping as the cut became wider and more of his doctor disappeared into his abdomen. It went on for ages. Will staring at the ceiling as Hannibal stared into him. Finally, he stopped.
Dr. Lecter smiled to himself, then turned to Will. "I've found it, dear Will. I will be done shortly."
When he began cutting away at Will's liver, he couldn't hang on anymore.
He gagged and vomited, spasming and sending blood out of himself. Hannibal removed his hands and Will's liver, placing it in a dish before stipping his gloves. He watched as Will Graham aspirated into his intubation and secured his head as he passed out, slowly removing the endotracheal tube so he could begin suctioning away the vomit.
Will was pale and his face was clammy with sweat, glistening and white like the most beautiful porcelain doll.
Hannibal quickly sewed Will up, ascending the stairs with the unconscious man in his arms and tucking him back into the silken bed that was now his home. He restrained him, tight and strong apart from the rest of his body. Hannibal couldn't do with his subject causing harm to himself.

Will slept until Wednesday, two days after the surgery and nearly a week after he found himself in his doctor's bed. He awoke slowly in smoky whisps of consciousness, feeling like he was being swept away in the freezing waters of a river back home. Like he was fishing with his Pop again with not a worry in his mind. But the outside of his body wasn't cold like his insides were, and he felt like he'd been ripped open across his abdomen. That's when the realization hit him once again, sending him vomiting onto the pillow beside his head.
Will retched and heaved, stomach spasming around nothing. He drooled over his cheek and shook with sickness until a warm hand found itself on his back.
"Calm yourself," Dr. Lecter hummed, "You'll rip and cause yourself more pain."
Will sobbed miserably and leaned back into the warm hand, desperate for comfort. The doctor shushed as he cried and rubbed soothing circles into the soft skin of his back.
"You are in a fragile state right now, William. I want to put you back together. Will you let me? Will you allow me to heal you, to make the pain go away, and to create a better life for you?" Will was silent, attempting to catch his breath as his doctor spoke, the words worming into his ears and blanketing his brain in warmth. "Or," Hannibal spoke again and broke through the fog in WIll's head, "would you like to keep suffering with the guilt of what you have done and live with this pain for the rest of your life behind bars?"
The decision was obvious and dimple.
"Help me," came his whisper, sounding harsh to his own ears. "Please help me, Dr. Lecter. I don't want to hurt."
Hannibal smiled behind the shaking man and continued to stroke down his back.
"You need only ask."

End Notes

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